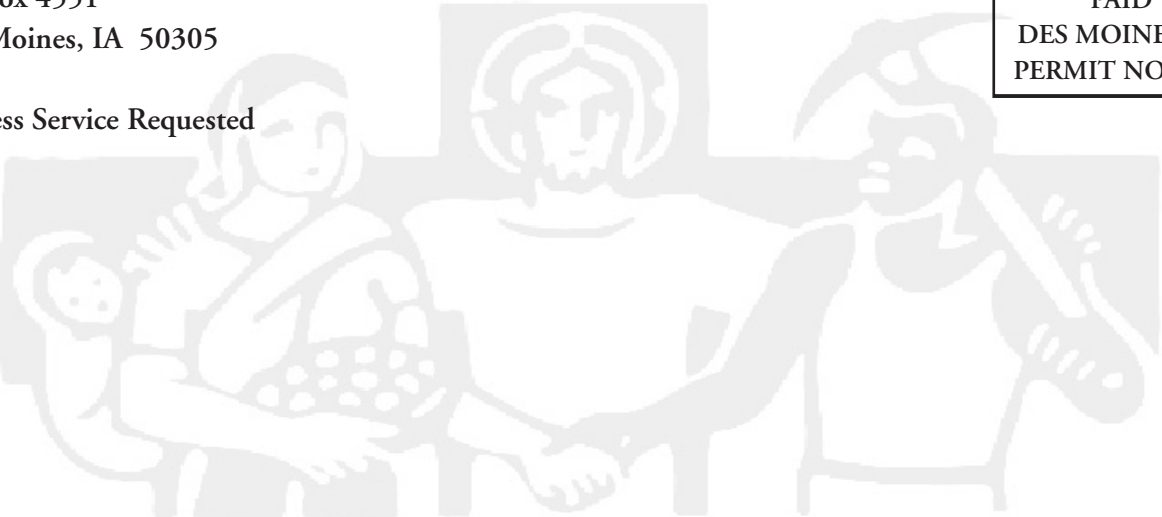


Via Pacis
Des Moines Catholic Worker
PO Box 4551
Des Moines, IA 50305

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December 2006

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**Worker
Wishlist**
**Requesting
your help . . .**

Prayers
Without them,
Nothing else
Matters

Volunteers
Individuals and work crews
needed for hospitality (serving
food, clean-up), general house
cleaning and/or maintenance.
Inside and outside

Renovation We need do-it-yourselfers, carpenters, plumbers and electricians to help with: Dingman House: * All New Kitchen * Fire Escape Lazarus House: * New Roof * Fire Escape Ligutti House: * Fire Escape We need your donations or skills!	Peace and Justice books for the Berrigan House Library Winter Survival Socks Winter Coats!! Shoes Jeans Sleeping Bags Blankets Tents	Pantry & Dairy Cereal, Coffee Canned Fruit Vegetables Beans Soups & Stews Sugar Coffee Creamer Juices Milk Cheese Butter Eggs	Toiletries Fem. Pads Tampons Disp. Razors Shaving Cream Shampoo Body Lotion Deodorant Toothbrushes Toothpaste Toilet Paper	Cleaning Supplies Bleach Dish Soap Murphy's Oil Soap Pinesol Toilet Cleaners Paper Towels Brushes Sponges	Over the Counter Medicines Tylenol Ibuprofen Multiple Vitamins Ointments Donations Cash donations are important to pay taxes, utilities, supplies and regular maintenance
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Vol. 30 #4

December 2006

via pacis

The voice of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community



DMCW Christmas Appeal
Page 1

via. pacis

The voice of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community

**December
2006
Vol. 30 No.4**

DMCW 2006 Christmas Appeal

— By Frank Cordaro, DMCW

This Christmas issue of the via pacis is coming to you late for several reasons. First because the last issue was delayed in getting out. We intentionally waited until after the October National CW Gathering to put out the last issue so we could cover the gathering.

Our hope was to put out this issue early in December. However, it was not meant to be. Our computer tech man, web page master and lay out person dropped out of sight. He's been over loaded with personal life concerns and unable to help us.

One of the things I've learned over the years at the CW is never to ask someone to do something they just are not able to do. It is a real art in people skills to know what to ask and what not to ask of someone to do. Chris served us very well the last year and a half and we are grateful for the work he did. He helped us leap into the computer world, got our web page started and did a wonderful job at laying out the via pacis. And if and when he returns to our scene I will have work for him to do, stuff he is good at and can manage.

In the meantime, getting this issue laid out and in the mail put me into crisis mode. Desperate men do desperate things. I started calling people I knew and people I did not know in different schools asking if there were any students in computer desktop publishing classes who might help us. I Googled "desk top publishing Des Moines Iowa" and got a list of commercial desk top publishing companies. I started calling them one at a time, explaining our plight and limited resources.

Hours into my manic mode, I got a call back from Alan Groen of Type-O-Graphics Two, a Des Moines desktop publishing company. I explained to Alan who we are and what our situation was. To my utter surprise Alan and the folks at Type-O-Graphics Two agreed to do the lay out for this issue of the via pacis. This year's DMCW special Christmas angles are the folks at Type-O-Graphics Two who came to our rescue!

God is good and so are generous people!

This issue of the v.p. is also serving as our annual appeal letter. The last few years we sent out separate appeal letters to previous donors. This year we are trying something different. The Newton Printing Co. has been printing the v.p. for the last three years. They also made a bid to print the mailing labels and mail out the v.p. For a couple hundred dollars more each issue these folks will print, make the labels and mail out the v.p. An all in one service, this will eliminate a week of labor intense folding; tabbing and labeling that we needed to do to get the v.p. in the mail. The Newton Printing Co. is also inserting a return envelope so you can more easily send us a donation.

The annual dollar amount we need to keep our doors open is about \$50,000. This is not a lot of money when measured it against what we do.

What does \$50,000 buy for the DMCW?

The biggest expenses we have are the utilities and property taxes for Dingman, Lazarus and Litgutti CW houses. (The Berrigan CW House is funded separately.) After utilities and property taxes, the next biggest item is the publishing and mailing out of the v.p. four times a year. It cost around \$1,600 an issue. We mail out over 4,000 copies. The community also operates and maintains a community van. And from our donated monies we pay for necessary house maintenance, repairs and improvements. No small thing with three 90 to 100 year old houses.

With these three houses we provide room and board for ten to fifteen adult live in community members plus any children added to the mix. Currently Carla's three teenage boys are members of our community.

We open up the first floor of the Dingman House five days a week, (not on Mondays or Wednesdays) between noon and 7 p.m. as a day time drop in center for those in need. On the days we are open we served a lunch and a supper meal, people can come in to the house and use the bath room, take a shower, get a cup of coffee, use the phone or watch the news or a ball game on TV. Some of our guests use our house as their mailing address.

We give away toiletries, clothes, underwear and canned foods when we have them. In the winter months we give away coats, scarves, gloves, candles and blankets. We have a sock exchange where our guests can exchange their dirty wet socks for clean dry socks.

We have a Free Food Store every Saturday morning in the basement of Trinity Methodist Church where we give away 600 to 900 pounds

of vegetables and fruits faithfully donated every week by the Comito family and the Capital City Fruit Co. We have a donuts, cake and bread give-away every Sunday at noon at the Dingman House.

In short, we offer a safe and friendly space for people to hang out, off the streets and out of the elements. No small thing for our guests who live outdoors or are on limited incomes with limited or no support. We see on average 50 to 150 people the days we are open.

We could not do this work without a large extended support community of people who bring in meals, donated toiletries, canned foods, socks, clothes and winter items. We have a great crew of regular volunteers who help person the drop in center and a few trusty souls we can call when a toilet breaks down and the door needs fixing.

With all this help and support we still need to pay the bills and that is what this beg letter is all about. Just to remind you, the DMCW gets no institutional monies from Church or State. We are not a tax deductible organization. No one is paid a salary. We have always relied on the generosity of our friends and supporters, most of who receive this v.p.

I began this beg letter saying I've learned never to ask someone to do something they just are not able to do. That it is a real art in people skills to know what to ask and what not when asking for help. I write this letter confident that our v.p. friends and supporters will be generous in their giving to our work. This confidence comes from years of experience, with knowledge that the work we do is truly Kingdom stuff. Mostly though my confidence rests in the Faith that if it's God's will for us to keep doing what we are doing, it will be done.

Blessed Christmas, joyful New Year one and all!

Frank Cordaro, DMCW



2 via pacis December 2006

Editor

Frank Cordaro

Layout

Type-O-Graphics Two, Inc.

Online

www.DesMoinesCatholicWorker.org

Who We Are

The Des Moines Catholic Worker Community, founded in 1976, is a response to the Gospel call to compassionate action as summarized by the Catholic Worker tradition. We are committed to a simple, nonviolent life-style as we live and work among the poor. We directly serve others by opening our home for those in need of food, clothing, bedding, a shower, or a cup of coffee and conversation. We also engage in activities that foster social justice.

Our mailing address is:
P.O. Box 4551
Des Moines, IA 50305

Community

■ **Bishop Dingman House**
1310 7th St.
515-243-0765

RESIDENTS:
Mohamed Elkhandagawi
Bob Zellmer
Mike McHugh

■ **Msgr. Ligutti House**
1301 8th St.
515-280-1216

RESIDENTS:
Jackie Robinson
Ed Bloomer
Bill Petsche

■ **Lazarus House**
1317 8th St.
515-246-1499

RESIDENTS:
The Dawson family:
Carla, Julius, Joshua, Jordan
Irving Schroeder
Norman Searah

■ **Phil Berrigan House**
713 Indiana Avenue
515-282-4781
frank.cordaro@gmail.com

RESIDENTS:
Frank Cordaro
Fran and Mike Fuller

■ **The Chipapas Project**
Chiapas, Mexico
Richard Flamer
flamerrichard@hotmail.com

Subscriptions

Free. To subscribe: mail, phone, or e-mail your name and address to frank.cordaro@gmail.com. Published four times yearly. All photos taken by DMCW members unless otherwise marked.

Peace begins with me...

— By Allison Leigh

Director of Campus Ministry, St. Catherine of Siena
Catholic Student Center, Drake University, DM IA

It may seem hopeless and even trite to wish and pray for world peace. The truth is just wishing and praying isn't enough if we don't take a hard look at ourselves, our culture and our world and recognize our need for conversion and our need for God's help.

It seems that life in these United States is built on a culture of fear, protection and antagonism. We are surrounded by reminders to look out for our own security; whether it's walking late at night, saving hard-earned dollars for our future or waiting in long lines to pass through metal detectors at airports and government buildings. Yet Jesus' life was just the opposite. He dined with the very people we so often fear. He

prayed for his persecutors. He preached loving our enemies. This is a message quite contrary to our culture, but this message is the one of peace and God's perfect love.

So what are we to do with this message? After all, we can't exactly end wars on the other side of the world can we? Oh but we can. We can by beginning with our own conversion, by praying for forgiveness and conversion of our own hearts. We can by living this message of love and forgiveness with everyone we meet; including our roommates, our neighbors, our professors and our families. Through our own prayer and conversion, we can live more peaceful lives and thereby cultivate a more peaceful world.

*Happy New Year from
everyone at
Des Moines Catholic Workers*

The Occupation Project: A Campaign of Sustained Nonviolent Civil Disobedience to End the Iraq War

INITIATED BY: **Voices for Creative Nonviolence. www.vcnv.org**

Voices for Creative Nonviolence is organizing the Occupation Project, a campaign of sustained nonviolent civil disobedience aimed at ending the U.S. war in and occupation of Iraq. The campaign will begin the first week of February 2007 with occupations at the offices of Representatives and Senators who refuse to pledge to vote against additional war funding.

Organizers in Des Moines will encourage and aid and abet small affinity groups to make visits to members of congress to demand they vote against funding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of these visits may be unannounced and employ creative nonviolent means to communicate our position and visitors may choose not to leave offices until representatives agree to stop supporting these wars with funding. Returns to the Des Moines offices of Senator Grassley and Rep. Boswell,

visited in September with the Declaration of Peace, will be made. Senator Harkin's position on funding will be looked into. Some friends in South West Iowa will want company when they go to visit Rep. Steve King's office in Creston

Local participation in the Occupation Project with a rally/press conference at noon on Thursday, February 8, at 12:00 outside the Federal Building downtown Des Moines. Each Thursday, then, for the next eight weeks we will join with the faithful and persistent group who have held vigil for peace for the last several years in Nollen Plaza, downtown Des Moines, from 11:30am to 1:00pm.

Local contact:
Brian Terrell at Catholic Peace Ministry
515-255-8114
<terrellcpm@yahoo.com>

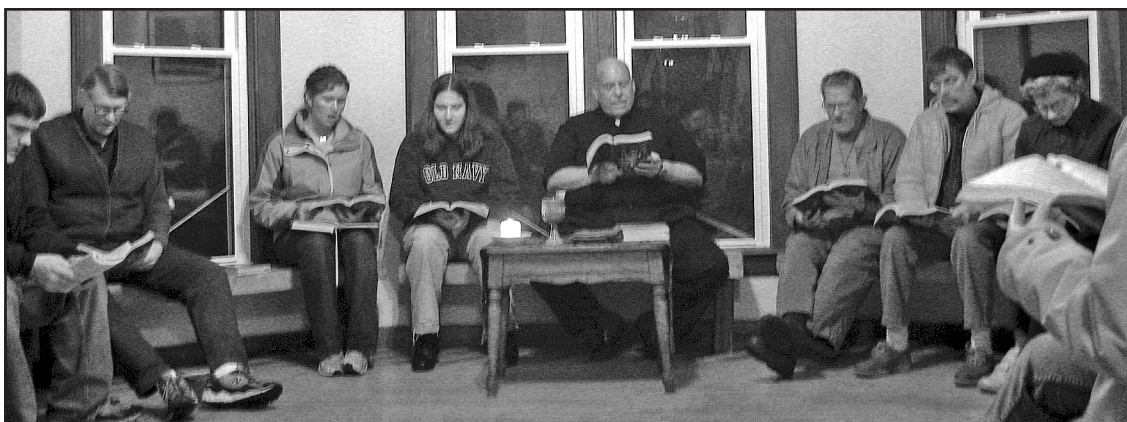


Photo (above): Fr. Tom "Tank" DeCarlo (Center), Celebrating Friday night Mass.



**Every Friday evening you are
invited to Mass or Scripture services at
7:30 p.m. at Dingman House
1310 7th Street, Des Moines, IA
All are welcome!**

Community News

— By Carla Dawson

Hi, I'm writing again. I hope and pray everyone is gearing up for a wonderful Holiday season, looking forward to Christmas. I am very happy to have finally recovered from the National Catholic Worker Gathering. I'm grateful to have met so many wonderful people. I'm sure all who attended are still marveling over the time we spent together. When I look back on the Gathering, I'm amazed. I hope everyone left with a sense of wonder at where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. It is truly a joy to be a Catholic Worker.

Fran, Eddie and Norman made their annual trip to the School of the Americas. Dagmar came down from the Emmaus CW House in Yankton, South Dakota and rode with them. Fran has been busy facilitating a Just Faith class. She is also working at Iowa Peace Net-work. IPN just had a holiday open house.

Frank was gone for a week to the East Coast over Thanksgiving. He and Laney went to visit her daughter and son-in-law. He had a great time traveling with Laney and looked much rested upon his return home. Frank has been working on getting a group together for the January 11th International Day to Shut Down Guantanamo, in Washington D.C. and organizing for the next Midwest CW Resistance Retreat in South Bend, IN, if you are interested in either, get ahold of him.

Mike Fuller is still work-

ing crazy hours at Kum and Go. He has been playing lots of scrabble and has a second tournament coming up in January.

Jackie just celebrated her birthday. She says she is a year wiser, only time will tell. Jackie, Landon, Shawnetta, Julius, Josh, Jordan and I, along with three of our great nieces spent Thanksgiving with our family in northeast Iowa. We had a great time.

Bill has been studying for his CDL license. Jack was home for Thanksgiving. Bill's friend Al spent a few days with us, he was traveling from Oregon to New Jersey to be with his family.

Eddie is in Louisville, KY. He stayed down south after going to the School of the Americas. He is visiting his family. He has a niece who is getting married, so he will be there for the wedding.

Landon has been taking tests to get ready to start school at DMACC. Landon has turned into a fine young man. He is a great addition to our community.

Shawnetta has reached her sixth month at Mercy Hospital. She will be starting school there in the spring.

Bob Zellmer is working out well. Bob has been with us about three months. He has a full time job now. He does a wonderful job on the bathrooms and showers and always pitches in when he is around.

Mike McHugh, whom some of you might remember, is back. Please read his article to see what has been happen-



Photo, right: Top row from left: Mike McHugh, David Costello, Cecilia Gutierrez, Mubammed Elkbhandagawi and Bob Zellmer. Middle Row: Landon Dawson, Fran Fuller, Mary Costello, Norman Searah and Jackie Robinson. Front Row: Bill Petche, Leisl Hoensbell, Ed Bloomer, Carla Dawson. Photo by: Frank Cordaro. (Not pictured: Frank Cordaro, Mike Fuller)

ing with him.

Dave and Mary Costello have moved into their new house. Dave did some needed repairs around the house and Mary cleaned out our upstairs office and it looks great.

Richard Flamer is back visiting us. He is here trying to raise money for the Chiapas Project. He is open for speaking events you can contact him at the Dingman House number.

Emily and Emiliano came back for a visit from Mexico. Emiliano has grown a lot

since he was last here. Emily is working at Mercy Hospital for the month that she's back. It is great to have them back. When I look at them I have renewed hope for the future.

Mohamed now has his Green card, and he is finishing up his first semester of credit classes at DMACC.

He is always cleaning around the house. It looks like we got the kitchen painted, but it was Mohamed who washed the walls. Thank you for all your hard work.

Norman has had three

excellent visits to the doctor. His blood sugar is much better. His blood pressure is normal and he has a little more function in his right hand. Everyday Norman gets up and goes somewhere. Norman said, "He had a great time visiting old and new friends at the National Gathering." Keep up to date with him in his article "Norman's Whereabouts".

Irving has not only been doing a lot of laundry he has

Continued on page 4

Norman's WhereAbouts

— By Norman Searah, DMCW Community Member

Sometime ago sometime before Thanksgiving Ed Bloomer, Fran Fuller, Dagmar Hoxsie of Yankton, SD Catholic Worker and me, Norman, went to a rally and protest. We went to the school of the Americas; it was my first trip there like so many others. Fran did all the driving and Dagmar was a good navigator.

It was good until we had an accident with a truck in Atlanta, GA. No one was hurt but the car. But the car got to the protest, back to Des Moines and back home to Yankton, SD. I learned a lot from this trip. I discovered that Fort Benning has been a military town since the Civil War. During the two World Wars, Korean and Vietnam wars it was famous for its training U.S. Military Infantry.

When we got there, there were only about a thousand people but close to the end of the protest there were around twenty-two thousand.

The gates were just a few hundred yards behind the stage, there were many singers, speakers and rappers. They spoke not only English but other languages and they weren't just white but all colors. If Martin Luther King, Jr. were alive he would be happy and thankful.

There were a lot of tables full of information, buttons, clothes and other stuff on one side of the road. I bought two DVD's, a CD and some buttons. I got a lot of information to bring back. I got around good; I brought my friend, my cane, with me.

I got to spend some time with Steve and Lana Jacobs from the Columbia, MO, Catholic Worker, Elton and a few folks from the Open Door Community. They fed a lot of people because they were in a good spot; down the road from them was the Christian Center for servicemen.

A few miles from where we stayed on Saturday night we went to Mass. The biggest one I have ever attended. There were a lot of people; most of them were college students.

On Sunday I got a chance to march in the largest funeral procession of my life. I got to see people with canes and wheelchairs. Now this might not mean much to you but to me it meant a lot. These people are also my brothers and sisters.

We should start to talk peace to one another, not resort to weapons. We must break the chains that oppress us, we must work for peace.

A long time ago I went to a Halem, Iowa, where a farmer was about to lose his farm. He treated me to a gift no one ever had before. He and his daughter took me for a ride, as we got near their farm he told me about his neighbors, not only their names, but everyone in the family, the living and the dead, and how they were all doing. They truly knew their neighbors. If you ask someone today about their neighbors, they don't know them or even what they look like and I ask why? I do. We should talk to our neighbors. That is what I am going to do, I am going to New York for a couple weeks so some of the Catholic Workers there can go to Washington, D.C., and not have to close their house. It is close to my home and I made a promise to someone. I hate it when Catholic Workers are low on staff. Ever since I found out how the government is treating foreign prisoners, I figured I could do some work at another house that is trying to get Guantánamo shut down.

But for now I'm telling others about diabetes and planning to go to Omaha to speak out about the horrors of the Nuclear Bomb, by attending the rally, letting people know we spend more money on killing than we do on healing a person.

I wish you and your family, and neighbors a Merry Christmas and may your New Year be a peaceful one.

I thank you for your time,

Norman Searah

4 via pacis December 2006

Everyday is Christmas

— By Fran Fuller, DMCW

"Gosh! You'd never know it was Christmas here," says a person dropping off a donation for the first time. "Where's the Christmas tree? Where are the decorations?"

No twinkling lights, no holly, no evergreen tree means no Christmas?! On the contrary, I explain. Everyday is Christmas here. Jesus shows up everyday not in wrapping paper or a Santa hat, but he's here each time a hungry person is fed and each time a tired person flops down in a chair for some much needed rest.

Loaves and fishes are multiplied on a daily basis. No one goes away hungry. Recently we were putting together some leftovers for our noon meal. We had a salad with iceberg lettuce and dressing, no extras, but the lettuce was relatively fresh. We had some warmed over spaghetti. And we were planning to open a giant can of applesauce for desert. But someone knocked on the door and came in with a box of goodies. There were bags of chopped radishes, carrots, cucumbers, hardboiled eggs, croutons; just perfect to add to our lettuce. And there was garlic bread, a fresh fruit salad and homemade cookies. Suddenly our adequate meal had turned into a banquet.



Gifts are hiding in every corner. There was the time that two guests came in looking for white shirts and black pants. They had just been hired for a job at the Wells Fargo Arena concessions and needed these clothes to be able to go to work the next morning. I said I'd check the supply room knowing that our clothing supply was almost totally wiped out. The odds were slim that I would

find anything but I said I'd look just so they would know I tried. I went to the shelf and there they were! Two white shirts and two black pants in the right sizes. Coincidence? Of course not.

Sometimes we're short-handed and it promises to be a busy day. People stop by to help out and once again, Jesus is present as the work is shared.

These kingdom moments

happen all the time at the Worker, but in my doubt, I'm always surprised. And I suppose if I took these miracles for granted, I'd miss out on the joy of the surprises.

So please, don't feel sad that we have no Christmas tree or holiday decorations. They would seem out of place and in the way of the real miracles happening here.

None of these miracles could happen without our

multitude of generous supporters and volunteers. There is no "magic" going on here, by the way. When you share your excess with those who have little, heaven breaks through and God's kingdom comes.

Thank you for sharing in this kingdom work. May God bless all the world this joyous season.

To The Editor:

— By David Costello, DMCW

It's Christmas—a time for peace on earth and good will towards everyone. Everyone you say? Does that include the terrorists? Does that include our country and world's leadership that got me into this mess and sit idly by while Darfur burns? Does that include members of

my own family or community that have hurt me? Does that mean the anti-abortion and pro-choice groups, the Republicans and the Democrats, the pro-capital punishment and anti-capital punishment groups, should all stop their screeching at one another for a while and reflect

on what it is we are really all about?

Peace—on earth—good-will—towards everyone. It is possible or just a dream? A fantasy? If God came to you in a dream and told you to bring peace to the world, where would you start? Is there a community out there

dedicated to practicing and preaching peace that could help you? It is possible to be a peacemaker without having peace in your own heart? Is peace possible without forgiveness?

These are just a few of the questions floating around in my head this Christmas

season. Are there any answers out there? It is an exciting time and opportunities abound.

May God's peace be with you always.

David Costello
1105 Orchard Place
Des Moines, IA 50313
515-419-1211

Christmas and Hospitality

— By Landon Dawson, DMCW

I just wanted to start off this article wishing everyone a very Merry Blessed Christmas. Second I would like to say that this is my first article so please bear with me.

When I think of Christmas, I think of not only December 25th, but also of every time

someone confesses their belief in Christ. Basically what I mean is that we know he was born, hung on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. So believing in him we will also rise again.

In the thought of hospitality there is a place for all of

us in his kingdom. But there is not a place for all of us in this world. Every day I see people who are homeless, some not knowing where their next meal is coming from. I see this from both sides, I have a home now but I've been homeless and could

be at anytime, so I try not to take it for granted.

This Christmas season I would like to ask for just one gift. I would like to have everyone remember those with less not only around Christmas time on your calendar but also every time

someone is baptized, during prayer, bible study, and even when you wake up in the morning. Because every time you believe in Jesus and what he was brought into the world for that is truly Christmas.

Peace & Love
Landon

Continued from page 3

Community News

been cleaning the basement at Lazarus House. The warm weather we had in November made for more towels to wash cloths and socks. Irving like always has stayed on top of it.

Julius is finishing up another semester at DMACC. Jordan is doing okay at night school. Josh is doing okay at North High School. Please keep them in your prayers as they navigate the waters of adolescence.

I have been extremely busy with my Physics class. I am now officially accepted at Drake University and start classes on January 16th.

I would like to thank everyone who has touched our lives this past year. As we go into a new year I would like to remember our friends who have

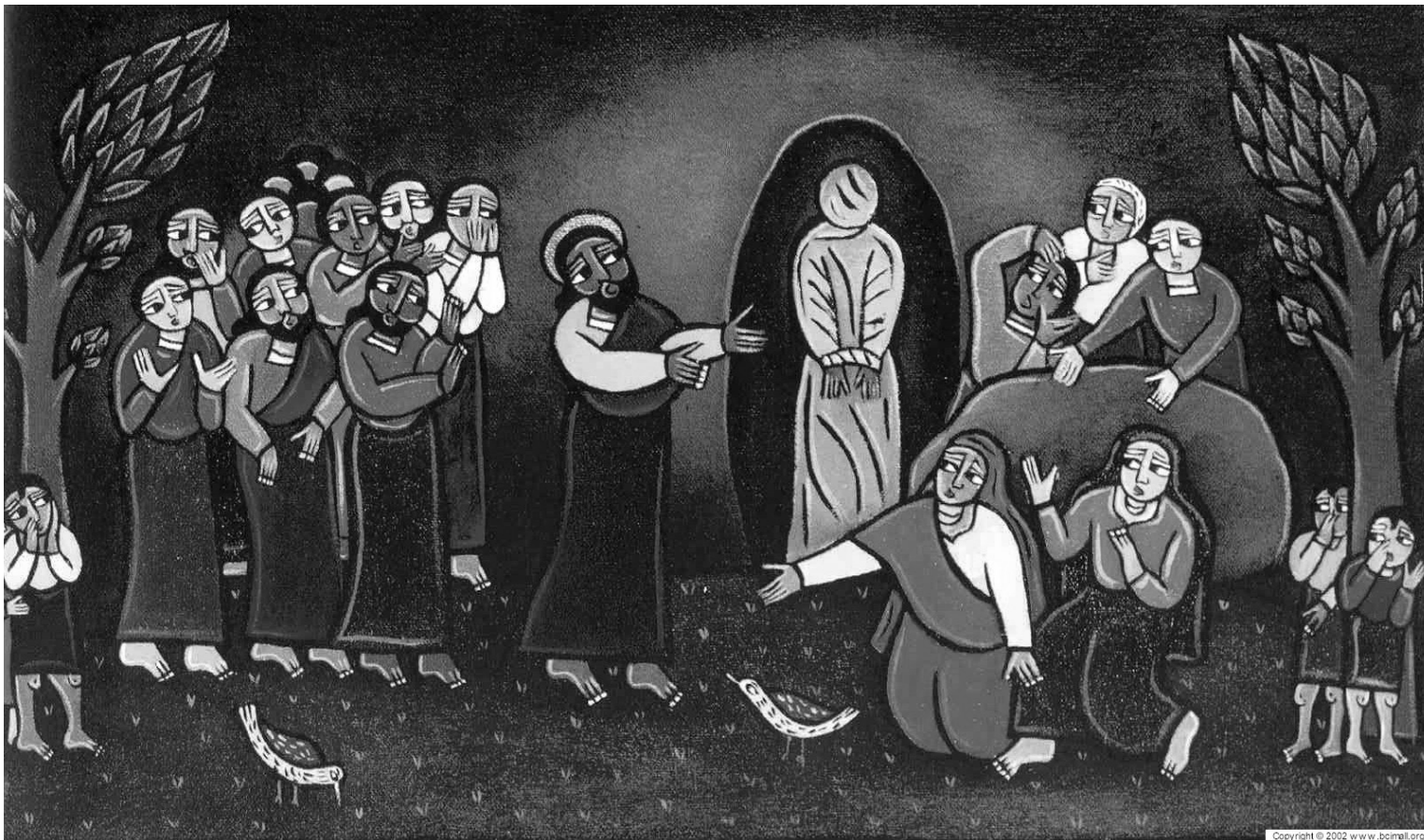
passed away, who have left their footprints on our lives. May we remember them fondly. I have an Advent song stuck in my head lately, "Waiting for the World to Change" by John Mayer. If you haven't heard it, I urge you to.

But I don't think we can just wait for the world to change; sometimes we have to help it change. I hope we can all continue to do our parts. May this holiday season give you the hope for change that helps you be the force for change you're hoping for. We at the DMCW wish you all a blessed Advent Season. Keep us in your prayers, and we will do the same.

Peace,
Carla

I Died In Lisbon

— By Mike McHugh, DMCW



(Michael McHugh was director of Catholic Peace Ministry in Des Moines, Iowa in 1992-95, and for the past eleven years has taught overseas in Asia and Europe. He is currently a resident of the Des Moines Catholic Worker, Bishop Dingman House.)

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?" (Luke 12:22-27)

In the past, I didn't understand Bible verses like the one above, and tended to dismiss them as promising 'pie in the sky, by and by', but then I died. I was in Lisbon, Portugal this September, when I collapsed in the street on my way to the supermarket. I mean I just sat there, breathing very heavily, sweating and unable to walk. I hadn't been feeling well for a few days, but I knew this was something else, something much worse than I had ever experienced before.

I've always disliked hospitals and never wanted to go to the doctor, but this time I had no choice: I couldn't move one step. When they put me in the ambulance, my blood pressure was so low they couldn't read it and my heart was racing along very rapidly in what they call tachycardia.

"Am I going to die?", I

asked the attendant, a young medical student who happened to speak English.

"No one dies in my ambulance", he said.

After that, I started praying, and meant it in a way I never had before. I recited Bible verses like "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" and "Thy will, not mine be done", and also said the Lord's Prayer. Throughout all of this I was strangely very calm, even though I knew I was dying. There wasn't any fear, just a sense of drifting away, going to sleep.

In fact, I was in shock, bleeding to death from an aneurism in the abdomen and had lost almost all my blood. They had to give me six pints through a direct line in my chest. I ended up staying in the hospital for three weeks.

In the Intensive Care Unit, they started doing all kinds of tests. My Spanish is better than my Portuguese, but I understood well enough when one doctor said: "Does he have cancer?" and another answered: "He's still too young." I hoped he was right, although everyone knows you're never too young to have cancer. I didn't have it, but I saw plenty of people who did, including a man not much older than me who had had much of his stomach removed and came back from the operating room screaming for morphine. An 84-year old man in the bed across from had been operated on for colon cancer, and spent much of his time vomiting uncontrollably. My near-death had not been so terrible in comparison: it was relatively fast and painless.

In the ICU, I learned for certain—at least to my own

satisfaction—that there is a God and an afterlife. I had always believed this intellectually, but this time there was a lot more than intellect involved. This is also unusual for me, since as a Ph.D. I always preferred to keep things abstract and theoretical if possible, always with a good dose of cynicism and sarcasm, but I couldn't do that now. This was really happening to me and I was no longer in control, much as I disliked that fact.



Mike McHugh

A group of doctors and nurses huddled together discussing my case when I began to drift off, leaving my body behind. I did not enter a tunnel or a white light, but I felt strongly that I was going away and the 'real world' was receding and fading away quickly. As I died, I was thinking: "Why are they making such a big fuss out of this? What's the big deal?" I was entering a place that seemed so much better than anything I had ever experienced before. Dying was nothing to be sorry about, but just a change from this physical state to a spiritual and eternal one.

I can't remember what it looked like, only that I had

arrived somewhere that is beyond my capacity to describe: it was a condition of complete rest, peace and happiness rather than something I could see, hear and touch. It was not this world, but a place where the evils of this world had no place and no power, as if they had never existed. That was all left behind.

I did see spirits there, some were angels and others were the spirits of people who had passed on. There were some around the beds of people in the ICU, comforting and guiding them. This whole experience seemed like a relatively short period in our terms, but time was irrelevant there. I was in and out of that state regularly, and I can still put my mind and consciousness back in it without much effort. On the other hand, I wasn't very worried about what the doctors were doing to fix my physical body. It wasn't as if I wanted to die, I just wasn't too concerned about it.

I got lucky. A surgeon was able to use angioplasty to close off the ruptured artery. I wasn't able to eat at all for quite a while—nothing except glucose and dextrose intravenously—and for a few days. I had a fever of 103-04 degrees. During this time, one of the surgeons asked me how I was doing and I joked: "I'm not dead yet." She laughed and said that "No, I've never seen any dead people talk."

People might say to me—some have—that my experience could have been caused by dying brain cells shutting down and dying off, deprived of oxygen, or a hallucination caused by blood loss or the

various drugs they gave me in the hospital. It was and is a totally subjective experience, one that can never be scientifically proven. I didn't come back from the dead with any strong desire to preach and convert the world to my way of thinking or inquire too closely into the state of other people's souls. We'll all find out the truth in the end, and I believe it will be better for most of us than what we have experienced in this earthly life. It is like a well of infinite grace, available to all for the asking.

My theology is pretty basic: there is a God; there is an afterlife, a state of grace and peace that is universal, available to all for the asking. I do not believe that you have to belong to any particular religion or follow any set of rules, doctrines and regulations to experience it. It's also no small matter that the fear, greed, violence, hatred and misery that are so typical of this material world will be left behind like old baggage in the afterlife. Those are not eternal, thank God.

Sometimes people have asked me if I regretted leaving this blissful state and the answer is definitely "yes": I did not want to come back. I think it's more a matter of I had to come back; it wasn't my time to die yet, I still had unfinished business.

Bible verses like those in Luke 12 speak to me more than ever before. Now I see Jesus' words as advice not to give into despair at the condition of the world, which is certainly easy to do at just about any time in history. There is another reality beyond this material world, however, beyond this physical life that we know for a relatively short time.

It is not that I have no concern for this world and now think everyone should simply wait for the afterlife to find justice. There has never been any doubt in my mind that all people have the right to a decent minimum of food, clothing, shelter and medical care, and that the resources of this world are hardly available at all to billions of people. All this I have seen in my travels many times. Of course, every day at the Catholic Worker I see many people broken and damaged in various ways, physically, spiritually and psychologically. Nevertheless, in the midst of war, poverty, suffering in this world, I now know there is an infinite reservoir of grace that we can all draw from that will alleviate the "worry" Christ spoke of in the Gospel.

6 via pacis December 2006

Vigil at St. Ambrose



December 10th Vigil at St Ambrose Cathedral in DM (L to R) Cynthia Ingham, Monica Newman, Brian Terrell, Elton Davis, Renee Espeland, Fran Fuller, Wendy Vasquez and Carla Dawson.

Maloy and DM CW'ers and friends Vigil at St. Ambrose to Stop Torture! Shut Down Guantanamo!

In a follow up to the statement from the National CW's October 2006 gathering in Panora IA, CW nationally and internationally organized solidarity vigils at local Cathedrals on Sunday December 10, the International Human Rights Day and the Second Sunday of Advent. At the October Gathering the CW'ers called upon the U.S. Catholic Bishops to speak out strongly and publicly against the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and against the U.S. Military Commission's Act that allows for U.S. sanctioned torture. Vigils took place in nine U.S. cities and in Dublin, Ireland.

Des Moines and Maloy CW'ers and friends vigiled at St. Ambrose Cathedral in DM IA before and after the 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Masses. They handed out over 250 leaflets. Below is the text from the leaflet handed out at St. Ambrose Cathedral on December 10.

STOP TORTURE! SHUT DOWN GUANTANAMO!

"Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable. Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now—without exceptions."

From the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (<http://www.nrcat.org/statement.aspx>) signed by Bishop William S. Skylstad, the head of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 2, 2006.

Today members of the Catholic Worker communities in the Diocese of Des Moines and their friends join with Catholic Workers at cathedrals in many cities around the United States and Europe to pray, vigil and witness against torture and illegal detention.

Today, December 10, is International Human Rights Day and is the second Sunday of Advent, a special day of peace in the calendar of the Catholic Church. We join today with Bishop William Skylstad and the Catholic bishops of the United States in recognizing that *"nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation."* A statement condemning torture does not fulfill an obligation, it announces one, and so we come to the cathedral today to call upon our bishop, pastors and all Catholics of our diocese to participate in the International Day to Shut Down Guantanamo, January 11, 2007. January 11 will be the fifth anniversary of first prisoners arriving in Guantanamo, Cuba, and will be marked with protests in Washington, DC, and many other communities.

Invitation to January 11 International Day to Shut Down Guantánamo in Washington DC

On January 11, 2002, twenty hooded and shackled men shuffled off a plane from Afghanistan, arriving at the U.S. prison at Guantánamo. In an attempt to sidestep the Geneva Convention protections for prisoners of war, the Bush administration created a new category of "enemy combatant" for these men captured in the "war on terror."

Since that time, more than one thousand men and boys have been imprisoned at Guantánamo. Accounts of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment have been condemned by the United Nations, Human Rights Watch and other reputable bodies. The prisoners have resorted to hunger strikes as a way of protesting their treatment. Many have attempted suicide; three men killed themselves on June 10th 2006. Desperation, fear and frustration mark their confinement.

Five years later, not a single prisoner has been charged, tried or convicted of any crime. Many have been released because no evidence has been found against them, but more than 430 men remain in indefinite detention without hope of release. The United States has abandoned law and justice.

January 11, 2007 marks five years of unjust imprisonment, isolation, beatings, interrogation and abuse for these men. We must say: no more. We must say: no longer. For our nation of laws, for our democracy, for our humanity and theirs, we demand small but essential steps to help return our nation to the best of our own traditions.

We mark January 11, 2007, as a day of national shame. But we can also mark it as a day of citizen action. How? By acting on behalf of our fellow human beings in Guantánamo, their bereaved families and all victims of the "war on terrorism." We declare January 11, 2007, an International Day of Action to Shut Down Guantánamo.

Schedule of Events on January 11 in Washington DC

- 10 a.m. — Press Conference at the U.S. Supreme Court (One First Street, NE) Hear from Guantánamo Lawyers, family members of prisoners, survivors of torture and others.
- 11:30 a.m. — "Prisoners of Guantánamo Procession" to the U.S. Federal Court In this massive street theater performance, hundreds of "prisoners"—each wearing orange jump suits, black hoods and chains, and bearing the name of a current detainee—will march in an orderly silent procession, stopping occasionally to kneel or bow at the beck and call of "prison guards" who accompany them. We hope to form a prisoner contingent that will consist of as many people as there are detainees to evoke a dramatic visual representation of the moral disgrace that is Guantánamo.
- 12-5 p.m. Vigil at the Federal Court (intersection of Constitution Ave, NW and Pennsylvania Ave, NW). Upon arriving at Federal Court, we invite people to deliver motions on prisoners' behalf to the Court. Those who do not wish to risk arrest will stay and continue to hold vigil outside the Court as part of a permitted rally and demonstration.

We encourage people to let us know in advance if they are willing to participate in either the Prisoners March, Civil Disobedience, or both.

There will be solidarity demonstrations from Amsterdam to Boise, Idaho and in Guantánamo, Cuba and a National Call-In Day to Congress. For a full list of solidarity actions, endorsers, and details of the day of action, please contact Witness Against Torture (www.witnessstorture.org)

For more information contact

Matt Daloisio — Ph (201) 264-4424 E-mail <daloisio@riseup.net> or

Frida Berrigan — Ph (347) 683-4928 E-mail <Frida.berrigan@gmail.com>

DM and Maloy CWers are organizing a contingent from Iowa to travel to Washington DC for the Jan. 11 Protest. Anyone interested in joining us contact:

Frank Cordaro at the Berrigan CW

House Ph (515) 282-4781

E-mail <frank.cordaro@gmail.com>

From Sudan to Guantánamo, Torture is Torture

— By Frank Cordaro DMCW



(LtoR) Regina and Jerry Farajalla, Fr John Bertogli St. Ambrose Cathedral Pastor and Brian Terrell.

We DMCWers are blessed. On December 10 we were welcomed at St. Ambrose Cathedral as we joined many other CWers nationally and internationally in solidarity vigils to call attention to U.S. sanctioned torture. Bishop Charron supported us by permitting us to vigil and leaflet before and after the Sunday morning Masses. And Fr. John Bertogli, pastor of St. Ambrose, plugged our vigil in the parish bulletin and advised his parishioners to take our leaflets and to give serious consideration and prayer to the issues we were raising.

The congregation at St. Ambrose Cathedral is unique and singular for a small Midwest Catholic Diocese. White people are in the minority. It has a reputation for being a refugee and immigrant friendly community. Parishioners come from all over the world, most coming here with little or

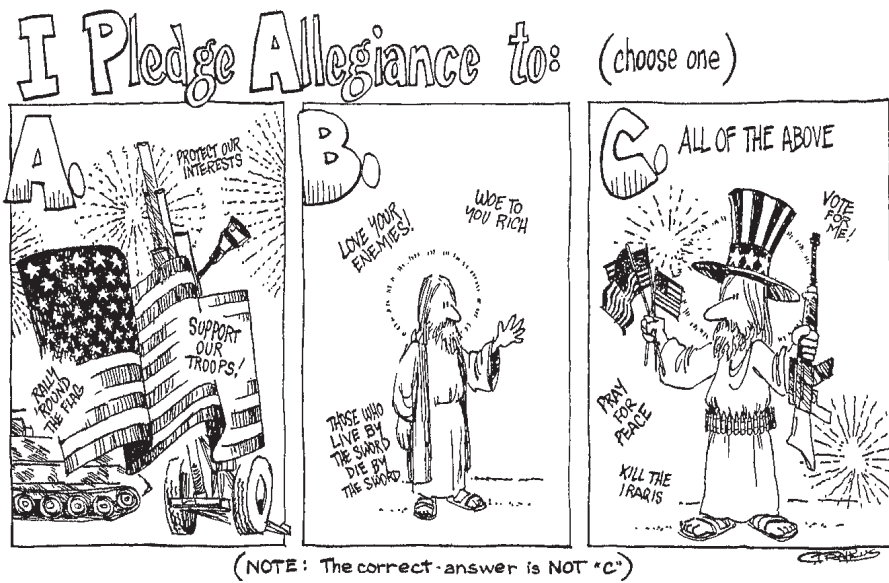
no money, many escaping one form or another of political violence. So, it was no big surprise, though noteworthy, that most people accepted our leaflet, welcomed our presence and thanked us for our effort.

Having said that, nothing could have prepared us for the arrival of Regina and Jerry Farajalla. It was before the 10:30 Mass when this distinguished looking Black couple got out of a car in front of the Cathedral. They were moving very slowly up the first set of steps leading to the Cathedral front doors. Regina was dragging her left foot, her left side was stiff and twisted and her face pained. She seemed to be recovering from a severe stroke. Jerry, her husband, was holding her arm, showing some degree of physical impairment of his own. Regina was clearly leading Jerry, yet

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Midwest CW Resistance Retreat to follow Catholic Peace Fellowship Conference

South Bend IN, March 24 - March 26



The fifth annual Midwest Catholic Worker Resistance Retreat will take place Sunday March 25 and Monday March 26, in South Bend, IN. Hosted by the South Bend Catholic Worker Community.

"The South Bend Catholic Worker hopes that the Midwest Catholic Worker Resistance Retreat will be an opportunity to challenge the University of Notre Dame to speak more clearly for peace, based on the tradition of the Church and the ancient teaching of the apostles. Our goal is to inform the consciences of those students participating in ROTC by bringing to light the stark contradiction between Catholic teaching and military training, so that they will become conscientious objectors to the military. We also hope that our actions, performed in the personalist manner of the Catholic Worker, will lead to the disintegration of ROTC at Notre Dame and all Catholic campuses." The South Bend CW Community.

The two day CW Retreat is designed to follow an all day Saturday, March 24th Catholic Peace Fellowship (CPF) Conference, "Neither Left Nor Right: the Heart of Christian Peacemaking". Jim Forest and Tom Cornell, long time Catholic Workers and co-founders of CPF, will lead the CPF Conference. Also presenting will be Michael Baxter, South Bend Catholic Worker and CPF national secretary, Joshua Casteel, Iraq War Vet and conscientious objector, Farah Marie Mokhtareizadeh, an Iranian-American Catholic activist who recently traveled to Lebanon. The cost for the CPF retreat is \$25. (This fee can be waived for those who can not afford it.)

Steve Jacobs of the Columbia, MO, CW community will lead and facilitate the CW Resistance Retreat which will end with a nonviolent direct action on the Notre Dame campus.

Housing and hospitality for the Conference and Retreat is being provided by the South Bend CW Community. Efforts to find beds for all out of town participants will be made with floor paces as a last resort (something reserved for the younger folks if necessary). All participants are encouraged to register for both the Conference and the Retreat. Pre-registration will be necessary for all who will need housing or any special hospitality needs.

Send notice of Registration to the Retreat Contact Person:

Brenna Cussen, Catholic Peace Fellowship staffer and

South Bend CWer Community member

P.O. Box 4232, South Bend, IN 46634

E-mail <staff@catholicpeacefellowship.org>

Phone (574) 232-2811 or (574) 287-7734

DMCWers Join 22,000 at the SOA



DMCWers Ed Bloomer, Norman Searab, Fran Fuller, and Dagmar Hossie (Yankton, SD, CWer) traveled to Fort Benning, GA, to participate in the annual protest calling for the closure of the School of the Americas (SOA/WHINSEC).

Sixteen human rights activists were arrested after carrying the protest onto the Fort Benning Military Reservation, publicly defying the laws which prevent political speech on military bases and making a bold call for justice and accountability. They were arraigned in federal court on charges of unlawful entry.

While over 22,000, a record number, attended the annual demonstration at the gates of Fort Benning, thousands more gathered at protests and vigils throughout the Americas. Coordinated actions protesting U.S. militarism and calling for the closure of the SOA took place over the weekend of November 18-19 in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay and Peru, as well as in Ireland, Canada and at other sites in the U.S.

Check out the SOA Watch website for updates and names of those arrested: www.soa.w.org.

Helen Oster Celebrates Her 90th Birthday



Retired teacher, widow and mother of two, Helen Oster is surrounded by friends and supporters at her 90th B-Day Party held at Dingman CW House Friday December 8.

Our friend Helen is a world traveler. She is a member of the DM Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Catholic Church's reform group, Call To Action, and is an active board member of the Catholic Peace Ministry. Through the years Helen has acted upon her desire for peace and hunger for justice by publicly protesting, even to the point of doing civil disobedience. When she is not "afflicting the comfortable", she is "comforting the afflicted" by volunteering weekly at the DMCW helping do the hospitality at the CW drop in center at Bp Dingman House. Over 70 people gathered to celebrate this wonderful woman's life and undaunted Spirit!

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From Sudan to Guantánamo, Torture is Torture

was leaning on Jerry to help navigate her way.

Thinking they were hard pressed to just get into the church, I did not bother to hand them one of our leaflets. Having conquered the first set of steps and moved beyond me, Regina veered to the right, her husband Jerry following her lead, heading directly toward Carla and Fran who were holding the banner "SHUT DOWN GUANTANAMO". I drew a breath, just as they asked Carla if they could help hold the banner. Regina and Jerry were from Southern Sudan where they

were victims of torture. They wanted to join our vigil, staying until it was time for the 10:30 Mass.

Afterwards, a couple of local TV stations had gathered to cover our vigil. As Regina and Jerry exited the church, I asked their permission to approach the newsmen about a possible interview. Agreeing, I ran down the remaining TV News team and persuaded them to do the interview. It was an amazing interview. They stood closely, holding on to each other. Jerry was the only one who spoke, as Regina could not. Their bright spirits

shined through them. Jerry spoke of how grateful they were to be in the USA. Emigrating from southern Sudan, they had witnessed large scale political violence, including the torture of many friends and family members. They spoke of others tortured in the Sudan and stated that they, too, were victims. The violence had left them physically impaired and emotionally scarred for life.

When the news reporter asked why they joined our vigil, Jerry told him that torture is torture, no matter where it happens or who is doing it. It

is wrong. It violates the most basic dignity of the human person. It serves no useful purpose. It brings great shame to the United States for having been associated with it. It was a strong statement.

Meeting Jerry and Regina was a humbling experience. It was reward enough for our efforts just to give these two extraordinary human beings an opportunity to speak their truths. It was especially heartening to do so with the full support and backing of our Bishop and the Cathedral congregation.